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JFK Backs CIA Role, Again Criticizes Diem

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President Kennedy last night vigorously defended the role of the Central Intelligence Agency in South Viet-Nam and declared that the reports that it was working at cross purposes to the State and Defense Departments were "wholly untrue." He also told his news conference that he saw no improvement in the regime of President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu since his remarks on a Labor Day TV show suggesting "changes in policy and perhaps with personnel" as a necessary element to winning the war against the Communist Viet Cong.

"I think we are still dealing with the same problems we were dealing with a month ago," the President said with implied reference to the Diem-Nhu regime's refusal to undertake political reforms.

CIA Principal Topic

The President devoted a good share of his 30-minute news conference to the subject of CIA, a normally sacrosanct matter which the White House never airs in public.

"I can find nothing, and I have looked through the record very carefully over the last nine months," the President declared, "to indicate that the CIA has done anything but support policy."

"I can assure you flatly that the CIA has not carried out independent activities but has operated under close control of the Director of Central Intelligence (John A. McCone), operating with the cooperation of the National Security

Council and under my instructions," Mr. Kennedy emphasized.

He acknowledged that the recent "transfer" of John A. Richardson, CIA station chief in South Viet-Nam, "has led to surmise." But he praised Richardson as "a very dedicated public servant."

Richardson reportedly was recalled from his post in Saigon last week at the request of U.S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge. Lodge, it is said, thought Richardson's long intimacy with Ngo Dinh Nhu, the real boss in today's South Viet-Nam, was interfering with current U.S. attempts to bring about reforms in the Vietnamese government.

Possible Disagreement

The President also acknowledged that "down below" in the ranks of CIA, State and Defense there may be "disagreement" over U.S. policy in South Viet-Nam. But he suggested that this probably would be caused by the lower echelons not being "wholly informed" about necessarily top-secret policy decisions.

Allen W. Dulles, CIA director during President Eisenhower's Administration, had declared in an interview earlier yesterday that inter-agency "backbiting" was making CIA the scapegoat for "lack of clear-cut operational policy in Washington."

The President insisted last night that "at the top" of each agency, there now was "no disagreement" on basic U.S. policy in South Viet-Nam.

The President yesterday also came out in flat opposition to a current proposal by Sen. Ernest Gruening (D-Alaska), Sen. Eugene McCarthy (D-Minn.) and others to set up a

congressional "watchdog" committee over CIA activities.

On March 11, 1956, the then Sen. John F. Kennedy (D-Mass.) was part of a minority group which sought to approve just such a committee. The bill, proposed by Sen. Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) was defeated by a vote of 59 to 27.

The President said last night that he is "well satisfied with the present arrangement" of having CIA's budget looked over by a selected few from the Senate and House Appropriations and Armed Services Committees, and its general activities looked over by his own Intelligence Advisory Council.

He indicated that the congressional budget supervisory work was well known. Actually, Congress has never acknowledged the membership of these committees. And the one matter of CIA operation these legislators are privy to—the budget—is kept secret even from their fellow members in the Senate and House.